



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Pictures Available

Perhaps the remotest grandfather of the next oyster you buy was on Noah's original passenger list—or menu.

Twenty to thirty centuries ago, the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, reported today the Chinese and Japanese were engaged in crude forms of oyster farming. By 100 B.C. Roman aristocrats who were very fond of oysters had set up salt-water tanks in their villas in which to hold oysters fresh for their tables. The pages of ancient history are dotted with references to the popularity of oysters and efforts to supplement the natural supply by artificial cultivation.

The first American Colonists found an abundance of oysters as far north as the coast of Maine. However, the beds north of Cape Cod early showed signs of exhaustion and by 1775 the native stock had practically disappeared from these waters. By 1840, even the more productive areas along the shores of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York showed signs of exhaustion and laws intended to conserve the supply were enacted.

In March 1835, a schooner laden with Virginia oysters arrived in Connecticut waters too late for that season's market. Rather than lose the cargo, the owners dumped the oysters overboard in a cove near New Haven. The following autumn it was discovered that these oysters had increased at least a third in size and were of most excellent flavor. This accident resulted in the bringing of thousands of

bushels of oysters from the Chesapeake by schooner every spring to supplement local stocks. This was one of the earliest steps leading to the development of oyster farming in American waters.

In the summer of 1862, Captain deBroca of the French Navy, acting under orders of Emperor Napoleon III, visited the United States for a study of our oyster industry. During this visit the Captain suggested the laying of old shells and brush on the oyster beds to serve as "cultch"--a hard, clean surface to which the tiny free swimming oyster larvae could attach without being submerged in soft mud and killed. Thus the volume of production of seed oysters could be greatly increased. A local resident who had the temerity to try this procedure was called a lunatic for following the suggestion of a "frog-eating Frenchman who had the cheek to come to New Haven and teach our oystermen how to grow oysters." Nevertheless, this innovation opened the way to further improvements, leading to the large-scale production of seed oysters which had culminated in the extensive oyster farming operations of the present day.

At present, of approximately 1,000,000 acres of oyster producing areas, some 200,000 acres, or 20 percent, according to Dr. Lewis Radcliffe, Director of the Oyster Institute of North America, are under private cultivation and yield between 55 and 60 percent of our annual harvest. The catch of market oysters in the United States in 1938, according to the statistical reports of the Service's Division of Fishery Industries, totaled 86,931,800 pounds (17,128,726 bushels) valued at \$8,457,731. Of this total, 50,880,600 pounds or 58½ percent, valued at \$6,224,816, or 73½ percent, were derived from private grounds.

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